

# South Bend Regional

## Welcoming Plan



**SOUTH BEND | ELKHART**  
REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP



**Welcoming Michiana**  
*Thriving Together*





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# Letter from Mayor James Mueller



December 7, 2023

Dear Neighbor,

The South Bend region has a long, rich history of immigration. From railroad, automobile and manufacturing industries, the South Bend region has attracted newcomers for economic opportunity since our city's founding. The ever-changing demographics of our community increase the urgency for us to prioritize quality of life improvements and livability in our city as we continue to welcome new residents and a growing economy.

We know that immigrants are vital contributors to our local economies. New data on the economic contributions of New Americans prepared by the American Immigration Council highlights the importance of creating a more welcoming community. In St. Joseph County, 87% of population growth between 2014 and 2019 was attributable to immigrants. These new residents contributed to the largest population growth of our city since Studebaker closed many decades ago.

The South Bend Regional Welcoming Plan is the culmination of more than one year of hard work and dedication from local organizations, governmental agencies, and volunteers. This plan lays the framework for improving the livability of South Bend for our new neighbors. As New Americans choose to make the South Bend region their home, now is the time to look forward to improving quality of life and livability for all residents. Our continued progress depends on South Bend being a place where our new neighbors feel welcome, safe, and a sense of true belonging in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Mueller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James Mueller  
Mayor, City of South Bend

# Letter from President & CEO of South Bend - Elkhart Regional Partnership, Bethany Hartley



**SOUTH BEND | ELKHART**  
REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

December 7, 2023

Dear Neighbors in the South Bend - Elkhart Region:

Immigration is the heartbeat of a vibrant and dynamic society - injecting innovative ideas, diverse cultures, and untold potential. Our region has welcomed waves of immigrants over the years, each broadening our local culture. These new American neighbors make the South Bend - Elkhart region stronger.

This document is the culmination of a year-long collaborative stakeholder effort to create a plan for how our region can build on past success with immigrant inclusion into our workplaces, civic engagement, and community. The South Bend - Elkhart Regional Partnership was honored to work alongside Welcoming Michiana and the City of South Bend - two organizations passionate for this cause.

Our region is one of just ten awardees in 2023 from Gateways for Growth to support this work. The Gateways for Growth Challenge (G4G) is a competitive opportunity for localities to receive research support and technical assistance from the American Immigration Council and Welcoming America to improve immigrant inclusion in their communities.

Immigrants are critical to our area's population growth, so we were grateful to the Gateways for Growth grant to better understand their experience.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bethany Hartley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Bethany Hartley  
President and CEO, South Bend - Elkhart Regional Partnership

# Executive Summary

## The New American Impact

The South Bend Region has a long history of welcoming immigrants. New Americans comprise an important and growing demographic in our region. According to a [data report](#) from the American Immigration Council, 87.2% of population growth in St. Joseph County between 2014 and 2019 was attributable to immigrants. In the South Bend-Elkhart region which includes St. Joseph, Elkhart, and Marshall counties, immigrants make up about 6.9% of the population but account for 9.3% of the working age population. The data report also shows that in 2019, immigrant residents comprised about 7.8% percent of the population of the city of South Bend but contributed 10.1% of the city's GDP.

The data is clear: New Americans hold great economic power and are contributing to population growth in our region. As we look towards the future, now is the time to bolster our welcoming efforts to ensure our growth continues.

Through a Gateways for Growth Grant, the South Bend-Elkhart Partnership, Welcoming Michiana, a program of United Religious Communities of St. Joseph County, and the City of South Bend collaborated to create this Welcoming Plan. The Grant also provided the data report from the American Immigration Council referenced above.

The following plan was crafted through a months-long stakeholder and resident engagement process. A survey of our immigrant neighbors was conducted with more than 138 responses, 119 of which were from St. Joseph County. Focus groups were also conducted with more than 77 participants. Finally, local organizations serving our new neighbors were engaged through a monthly stakeholder meeting.

The surveys and listening sessions provided some key takeaways about the needs of our New American neighbors. The top three needs of immigrants in the region based on the survey were:

- More programs to help immigrants find work in line with their education & experience
- More opportunities to improve language skills
- A central location where immigrants can receive services

The stakeholder group identified three main areas of focus for this plan:

- Civic Engagement + Community Leadership
- Safe + Connected Communities
- Economic Development + Education + Equitable Access

# Executive Summary

## The New American Impact cont.

Based on the needs identified by our New American neighbors and stakeholders, the following pages will overview the goals and strategies that should be implemented to address the needs of our New American neighbors in order to become a more welcoming city, county, and region.



# Introduction

## The Three Pillars of the Plan

To become a more welcoming region for our New American neighbors, we have identified goals and strategies under three pillars: Civic Engagement + Community Leadership, Safe + Connected Communities, and Economic Development + Education + Equitable Access. The strategies of each pillar often overlap.

The following pages of our Welcoming Plan list suggested strategies to make the South Bend region a place where all who call it home can access opportunity, feel safe, and find belonging.



**Civic Engagement +  
Community Leadership**



**Safe + Connected  
Communities**



**Economic Development +  
Education + Equitable Access**

# Pillar 1: Civic Engagement + Community Leadership



## Goals

- Increase the ability of all residents, regardless of their country of origin, to fully participate in all aspects of civic life, including government and other decision-making bodies.
- Ensure that the voices of all residents are represented and have a voice in public affairs.
- Enhance the relationship between New Americans and public institutions that protect them, including law enforcement, emergency response, code enforcement and all levels of government.

## Strategies



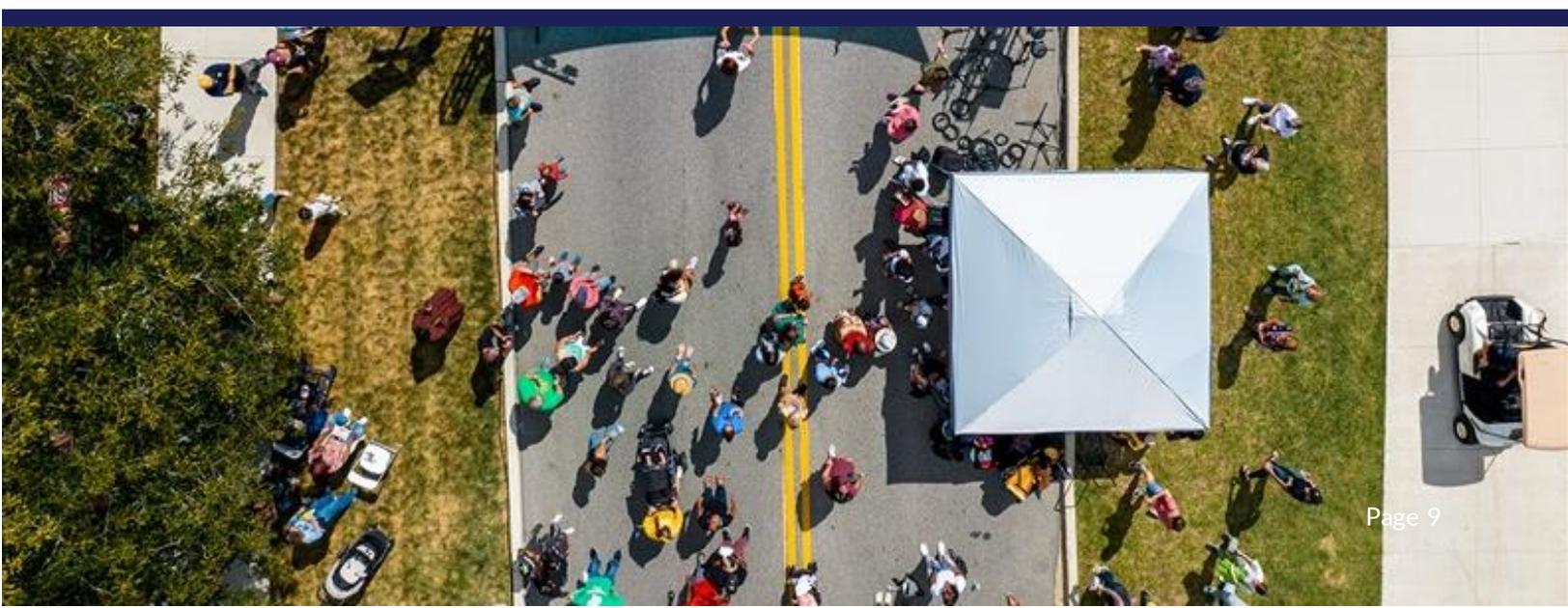
Make interpretation and translation services more readily available, especially in locations where people access essential services, like medical offices, government offices, schools and banks. Explore technology-based options.



Increase the number of immigrants in local decision-making bodies, including elected and appointed positions.



Recruit more immigrant representation in institutions like law enforcement, emergency services and government agencies.



# Pillar 2: Safe + Connected Communities



## Goals

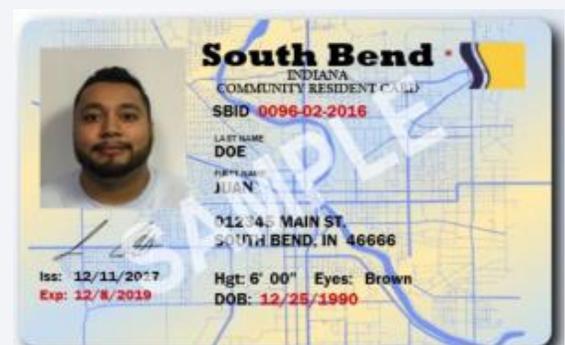
- Improve New American's sense of physical safety and connectedness to the community as a whole.
- Strengthen the ability of New Americans to feel a part of the community in which they live through meaningful relationships and an increased sense of belonging.

## Strategies

-  Create an information hub that centralizes referrals to resources, making it easier for New Americans to find the help they need.
-  Develop a process among organizations to better serve New Americans and share information.
-  Raise awareness among all immigrant communities about available services.
-  Facilitate access to reliable low-cost healthcare resources including mental health resources through community health workers and other outreach.
-  Work to increase access to transportation, including public transportation, driver's licenses, and ride-sharing options.
-  Create a plan to establish better internet access in unreliable areas.
-  Increase community-building activities with New Americans and long-time residents, including social gatherings around food, faith, and other common interests.
-  Encourage cultural competency training for service providers and community members to bridge cultural understanding gaps and promote social connections.

## Spotlight

In 2017, the City of South Bend worked with local nonprofit La Casa de Amistad to launch the municipal ID program. The ID cards are for any resident of the city, and especially those who have difficulty obtaining other forms of identification. They can be used to access City services, transcripts, and financial statements, among other uses.



# Pillar 3: Economic Development + Education + Equitable Access



## Goals

- Increase access to services including education at all levels, financial, health, housing, and transportation, among others.
- Improve New Americans' ability to participate in the local economy through job placement and training opportunities.
- Develop support for immigrant entrepreneurs and improve their access to opportunities.
- Improve access to English learning services.

## Strategies

-  Create a positive narrative highlighting the economic contributions of New Americans in the community.
-  Develop career pathway guides for internationally trained professionals so they can more quickly return to their careers of choice.
-  Improve collaboration between local organizations to ensure New Americans are included in outreach efforts (e.g., job and resource fairs).
-  Increase English language class offerings at more varied times to be accessible to more people.
-  Encourage employers to provide on-site English classes for their workers.
-  Provide resources and financial education to New American entrepreneurs.

## Spotlight

In 2023, the City of South Bend launched the High Skill Immigration Fund to help fill gaps in high-demand jobs locally, boost the regional economy, and attract and retain high skilled talent in the South Bend region by supporting businesses who sponsor employees through H-1B visas.



# Pillar 3: Economic Development + Education + Equitable Access



## Strategies cont.



Increase and improve affordable housing stock, childcare, and public transportation.



Advocate for work authorization for all immigrants and promote pathways to employment, including apprenticeships.



Encourage state boards to modify professional license programs to help immigrants obtain relevant certifications.



# Special Thanks

## Community Organizations

1st Presbyterian Church  
American Immigration Council  
Catholic Charities Western Region/Fort  
Wayne South Bend Diocese  
City of South Bend  
Downtown South Bend, Inc.  
enFocus, Inc.  
Indiana University – South Bend  
Islamic Society of Michiana  
Ivy Tech Community College  
La Casa de Amistad  
Latin American Chamber of Commerce  
Neighbor to Neighbor  
Robinson Community Learning Center  
Salvation Army  
St. Joseph County Health Department  
South Bend Community  
School Corporation Adult Education  
South Bend-Elkhart Regional Partnership  
St. Joseph County Public Library  
St. Joseph County Health Department  
Saint Mary's College  
United Religious Community of St.  
Joseph County  
United Way  
University of Notre Dame  
Welcoming America/Gateways for Growth  
WorkOne

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